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ABSTRACT

A system of Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) was organized in December 1985 covering all 50 states and the territories. Each of the nine laboratories addresses regional needs for school improvement. This report (1) provides lab names, states served, and contact information; (2) describes REL tasks; and (3) focuses on REL collaboration on state policy. Each REL must address five tasks (two of these tasks must relate to working with state-level decisionmakers). Another task must relate to school improvement issues; examples of individual laboratory efforts include issue-specific analysis, research, and communication among state-level groups. Another task requires labs to "work in collaboration with centers and other labs on regional and national educational problems." One of the targeted themes, collaboration on state policy, aims to enhance policy support systems and to provide methods to share and extend labs' products and resources. Activities that have occurred or are planned for 1987 to support this theme include the following: (1) name a lab institutional coordinator; (2) conduct planning sessions; (3) develop a policy issues framework; (4) compile policy documents; and (5) work with state-level policy aides. Although it is early in the collaborative effort, a number of findings has already emerged. The labs should benefit from the networks established with national organizations, and the national organizations can use RELs to focus regional activity and to disseminate services. Efforts to identify and track reform activities seem to be particularly important to state decisionmakers; RELs' projected policy issue materials will be useful tools in the policy analysis process. The training of legislative aides is a key to the development of informed state policy for reform. (CJH)

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Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the
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Introduction

In December of 1985, a system of Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) covering all fifty states, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and the Pacific Trust Territories became a reality. Some of these Laboratories have existed since 1965. Others began operations less than eighteen months ago. However, for the first time there is a nationwide set of nine RELs with each addressing regionally defined needs for school and classroom improvement. Each Lab serves a specific geographic region and is governed by an independent board of directors.

These Labs and the states they serve are:

Appalachian Educational Laboratory (AEL)
Location: Charleston, West Virginia
Telephone: (304) 347-0400
States Served: Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia

Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development (FWL)
Location: San Francisco, California
Telephone: (415) 565-3000
States Served: Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah

Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL)
Locations: Aurora (Denver), Colorado; Kansas City, Missouri
Telephone: (303) 337-0990; (816) 756-2401
States Served: Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri, Wyoming, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)
Location: Elmhurst, Illinois
Telephone: (312) 941-7677
States Served: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL)
Location: Portland, Oregon
Telephone: (503) 248-6800
States Served: Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands

Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands

Location: Andover, Massachusetts
Telephone: (617) 470-0098
States Served: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands

Research for Better Schools (RBS)

Location: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Telephone: (215) 574-9300
States Served: Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania

Southeastern Educational Improvement Laboratory (SEIL)

Location: Research Triangle Park (Raleigh/Durham), North Carolina
Telephone: (919) 549-8216
States Served: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL)

Location: Austin, Texas
Telephone: (512) 476-6861
States Served: Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas

Appended to this paper is a map depicting the REL regions.

Each REL must address five tasks. Two of these tasks relate, at least in part, to working with state-level decisionmakers.

Task 3 requires Labs to "Work with State-level decisionmakers on school improvement issues." Each REL is addressing this task in a regionally-responsive manner through such efforts as:

- Providing technical assistance in response to the efforts of State-level decisionmakers to create a legal, regulatory and administrative context sensitive to school improvement issues;
- Doing issue-specific analyses or syntheses needed by State-level decisionmakers; and
- Facilitating communication among State-level groups (RFP, pp. 24-25).

Examples of individual Lab efforts include conducting/sponsoring/providing policy research studies and policy analysis reports, mapping and tracking educational reform initiatives, conducting policy seminars and forums, producing policy newsletters and briefings, and networking state-level decisionmakers.

Task 5 of the REL contracts requires Labs to "Work in collaboration with centers and other laboratories on regional and national educational problems."

Several themes have been targeted for collaboration. One such theme is Collaboration on State Policy, and this effort is the focus of this paper.

Collaboration on State Policy

Two objectives were selected on which to focus initial activities of Collaboration on State Policy:

- Enhancement of policy support systems with an emphasis on increasing the capacity of Labs as well as State and national agencies and support groups; and

- Provision of methods to share/extend Lab resources and products given the Labs' responsibility for the development and analysis of specific policy issues.

To date, the following activities have been conducted or are planned to occur this year under the theme of Collaboration on State Policy:

Name a Lab Institutional Coordinator

Each Laboratory named a Coordinator with responsibility for this effort. In most cases, these were the REL Task 3 Coordinators. They are:

- AEL: Pam Lutz
- FWL: Doug Mitchell; replaced by Tom Timar
- McREL: Shirley McCune
- NCREL: Harriet Doss Willis
- NE/I: Rick Basom
- NWREL: Rex Hagans
- RBS: Richard McCann
- SEIL: Joe Haenn
- SEDL: Martha Smith

Conduct Planning Sessions

Representatives from each of the RELs except the Northwest Lab met at the SEIL Offices in the Research Triangle Park to begin collaborative planning activities. The objectives of the collaboration were identified and tentative plans for Year 1 operations were prepared. A subsequent breakfast planning session at the 1986 AERA Annual Meeting and numerous telecommunication exchanges through the Source Mail facility solidified these plans. Telecommunication continues to be a major source of planning.

Commission Lab Policy Development Orientation Paper

In order to focus a Policy Retreat planned for the fall of the first year, a paper was commissioned to be developed by William Dunn of the Center for

Knowledge Use at the University of Pittsburgh. This paper, subsequently titled "If Educational Policy Analysis is the Solution, What is the Problem? Options for Regional Labs", was to present alternative approaches for maximizing the impact of Regional Educational Labs on decision making. It concluded that a Lab's impact would be affected by the option(s) it chooses for conducting policy analysis, developing and disseminating policy-relevant information, and assessing the policy impact of analysis, development, and dissemination.

Options for conducting policy analysis include its focus, time frame, and division of labor. The policy-making process features the phases of problem setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation, and policy assessment. Various types of policy-relevant documents can be developed, with numerous dissemination procedures available. Options for assessing impact can be formal or informal, random or systematic. Labs could probably benefit from systematically different methods of policy analysis, development, and dissemination, but should use a common method of assessment to compare the relative success of the different methods.

Copies of the paper are available through the Task 3 Coordinator identified above for the Laboratory serving your region of the country.

Conduct Fall Policy Retreat

The focus of this first collaborative policy retreat was on presentation and discussion of the paper developed by William Dunn. However, two other activities received major emphasis.

First, representatives of several national organizations concerned with state-level policy development were in attendance. These included:

- Beverly Anderson, Education Commission of the States (ECS)
- Susan Fuhrman, Center for Policy Research in Education (CPRE)
- David Mack, Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
- Jean McDonald, National Governors' Association (NGA)
- Peggy Siegel, National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) (also presented information on NASBE- National Association of State Boards of Education)
- Lisa Walker, Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL)

These representatives gave presentations on current efforts underway by their organizations in an effort to identify common areas of concern.

The other activity concerned initial planning for Year 2 activties. A Proceedings Document was developed to summarize the activities of the Retreat.

Develop Policy Issues Framework

During the initial planning meeting, a list of policy issues was developed. These policy issues are:

- o Adult Learning Theory
- o Administrator Leadership Training
- o At-Risk Youth
- o Bilingual Education
- o Career Ladders/Mentor Programs
- o Community Support/Involvement
- o Curriculum Alignment
- o Curriculum Content Specification
- o Curriculum Reform
- o Early Childhood Education
- o Education & Economic Development
- o Extended School Day/Year
- o Graduation Standards
- o Higher Order Thinking Skills
- o High School Dropouts
- o High School Structure
- o Inservice Education
- o Instructional Strategies
- o Performance-Based Education
- o Policy Evaluation
- o Rural/Small Schools
- o School Age Child Care
- o School Buildings
- o School Finance
- o Science and Mathematics
- o Student Testing
- o Teacher Certification/Testing
- o Teacher Education
- o Teacher Professionalism
- o Teacher Recruitment/Labor Market
- o Technology Utilization
- o Tracking Educational Reform
- o Urban Schools
- o Vocational Education
- o Work/Education Partnerships
- o Writing Assessment

At least ten other categories were developed over the course of the year.

The first application of the listing of policy issue areas was the development of a matrix of policy issues by Laboratory. Each REL indicated the level of involvement of its staff and programs on each issue area using one of five response indicators:

0 = Not a Lab theme area or policy issue area or organizational effort
1 = An emerging Lab/organizational policy issue area, a Lab/organization staff interest area, or a non-OERI funded Lab activity
2 = A Lab theme, but not specifically identified as a policy issue area
3 = A Lab/organization short term or one-time Task III State Policy issue
4 = A Lab/organization ongoing Task III State Policy issue

In addition, one or more staff members (and their telephone numbers) were listed for each REL where the response indicator was "1" or higher. Thus, for example, one could readily see for the policy issue area of Tracking Educational Reform that six RELs consider this to be an ongoing Task 3 State Policy issue.

At present, the matrix is still in draft form and available only in hard copy. However, following updates and revisions to the matrix plus the addition of levels of activity and contact persons for national organizations, the matrix will be available as an on-line share file through The Source.

Policy Document Collaboration

Based on policy issue areas of mutual interest as identified through the Policy Issues Matrix or other methods, RELs are being encouraged to collaborate on the development of policy issue documents and/or products. Although no known documents have been developed collaboratively to date, there are many instances where information has been obtained from collaborating RELs/national organiza-

tions during the development of individual Lab policy documents through sources identified as part of the collaborative effort.

State Policy Collaboration Meetings

As collaboration efforts become more focused, so do the State Policy Collaboration Meetings. Two such meetings are planned during the second year of collaboration. The purposes of the first meeting will be to share information about what the Labs and national organizations are doing within a topical area of educational reform, to facilitate brokering of this information to Lab member states, and to identify potential gaps/information needs for future study and analysis (by individual Labs or national associations) to inform future policy decisionmaking. The education reform topic for this meeting is to be chosen collaboratively later this week.

The focus of a second meeting to be held next fall will be determined during this first meeting.

Compilation of Policy Activities

During the first State Policy Collaboration Meeting this year, there will be considerable sharing between Labs and national organizations around the educational reform topical area. The results of these discussions will be summarized in a document which attempts to capture common themes and identify potential areas for collaborative policy research.

Compilation of Policy Documents

Each Lab and national organization has developed one or more policy documents or products related to a area of educational reform. However, there is not presently a listing of such cross-Lab products. Therefore, one activity to be completed this year is the development of an annotated bibliography of policy documents across the Labs and participating Centers and national organizations. For each policy product, there will be a citation, an abstract, and complete ordering information. The compilation will include a cross-referencing of documents by policy issue area.

Policy Development Handbook

A handbook which presents a "how to" for policy development is being sponsored by the Lab State Policy Collaborative and is currently under development by Bill Dunn of the University of Pittsburgh and Rick Basom of the Northeast and Islands Lab. It will focus on the primary audience: state-level policy analysts and planners that support the key state educational policymakers. This audience includes governors, legislators, chief state school officers, and state boards of education.

The need is to present neutral, policy-relevant information to policymakers to better inform the policy debate. There are at least two reasons for policymakers to be aware of strengths and weaknesses of their options. The first is to prevent "blind sides" or surprises from opposing points of view. This is the pragmatic reason. The second reason is that better information can lead to better decisions. The purpose of this handbook is to walk through a process of reflection and analysis to reach plausible solutions to problem situations in education. The handbook will have many case applications from the field of education.

The primary discussions in the manual will cover:

- o How to set parameters and define the problem;
- o How to model decisionmaking scenarios;
- o How to identify and satisfy policy-relevant information needs;
- o How to structure the problem;
- o Options for conducting policy analysis;
- o Options for developing and disseminating policy-relevant information; and
- o Options for assessing the policy impact of analysis, development, and dissemination.

A draft of the manual should be available in November, with the manual available through your regional Lab.

Working With State-Level Policy Aides

One approach being used by several of the Labs is to work with state-level legislative aides who have responsibility for educational concerns or are assigned to state education committees. Although these aides do not make educational policy per se, they have a great responsibility in informing its development. The task of the Labs is to see that these individuals view the Labs as one source of educational information during the policy analysis stage.

At the national level, the Danforth Foundation is attempting to develop an organizational structure for these persons, who have no such organization presently. A representative of this group of legislative aides, Carl Frantz of Louisiana, has been invited to join the group of national organizations invited to State Policy Collaboration functions.

Educational Reform Database

Several Labs are developing databases of educational reform initiatives. Three Labs (AEL, NE/I and SEIL) are developing a common framework which can be used to establish an electronic database. Such databases provide useful first-stop sources of the latest information on educational reform efforts.

Summary

Although it is still early in the collaborative effort, a number of useful products and findings already have emerged. The Labs should benefit from the networks established with national organizations and their reform efforts, while the national organizations can use the RELs as one method of focusing activity within a region and as a dissemination channel for products and services. Each of the Labs has been successful to varying degrees in networking state-level decisionmakers and providing them with technical assistance and policy analysis information to inform state decisionmaking. The efforts to identify, capture and track education reform efforts seem to be of particular importance to state-level decisionmakers. The Policy Development Handbook and matrix of policy issue resources will provide useful tools in the policy analysis process. Finally, the identification, networking and training of legislative aides is seen as a key to the development of informed state policy for educational reform.